

*STYLE REPORT:*

# PERFORMANCE FABRICS



**elevated**

technology, design raise the  
bar on textiles that perform

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SEPTEMBER 2019

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STYLE REPORT:  
**PERFORMANCE  
FABRICS**

A SUPPLEMENT TO FURNITURE, LIGHTING & DECOR

I’m dating myself here, but when I was young, “performance” meant vinyl over the upholstery fabric. I remember sticking to those vinyl covers at friends’ houses on hot summer days. My mother went for dark, multi-colored plaids that hid stains instead.

Fast forward a few decades — I choose to withhold how many — and performance textiles have changed significantly. Stain-resistance is just one of the myriad attributes of performance fabrics today, and consumers want it. Kids, pets, senior care, Airbnb ... there are lots of reasons performance textiles have evolved for residential and commercial applications.

Not only are some of these textiles sun-resistant, stain-resistant and durable, design has been elevated to make them beautiful, luxuriously comfortable, and in some cases, environmentally friendly. And there are now fabrics that work both inside and out.

But what works where and why? When



your retail or design customers request performance fabrics, how do you explain the different attributes they need and why? If your customers are at all like me (the average consumer), they’re more interested

in the colors, textures and patterns than how the fabric meets their needs. How many of us pick a car based on color and design rather than technology features?

To help you easily share the technical details your customers should be paying attention to when choosing performance fabrics,

here at *Furniture, Lighting & Decor*, we’ve talked to textiles makers immersed in performance to break down the differences in fabric capabilities, what’s trending in color and texture, and how performance fabric is impacting home design.

We learned a lot, and we hope you and your customers will too.

**Diane Falvey**  
Editor-in-Chief



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**ON THE COVER**

Perennials by Timothy Corrigan is a landmark collection of 100 percent solution-dyed acrylic fabrics and rugs inspired by the designer’s travels. They blur the line between indoors and out in design and durability.

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# SELLING PERFORMANCE FABRICS WITH CONFIDENCE

BY ERIN BERG

## Performance Fabrics Unfold and Take Hold

Today, people live on and with their furniture, demanding performance and function along with great style. Performance fabrics are designed specifically for durability and cleanability in environments with high use, risk of stains and soils, or exposure to exterior climate conditions.

Long used in commercial and hospitality settings, performance fabrics are growing in residential use as more people are becoming aware of the long-lasting and easy-to-clean benefits that make them well-suited for the modern lifestyle.

"The performance fabric category is seeing a 'resimercial' blend," says LeAnne Flack, Marketing Manager of South Carolina-based Milliken Specialty Interiors, producer of the Breathe performance fabric brand. "Residential upholstery fabrics are demanding physical performance that is approaching commercial-grade performance, while the design aesthetics of residential upholstery are influencing the commercial applications."

"A few years ago, consumers didn't know what performance fabrics meant but they are savvier now," says Gloria Tsocos, Design Manager for Outdura, a Hudson, NC-based producer of 100 percent solution-dyed acrylic fabrics for indoor and outdoor casual furniture. "The aesthetics have evolved, allowing us to do more, such as create beautiful designs with novelty yarns that offer performance and a soft, lofty hand." \*

**"THE DESIGN AESTHETIC AND TECHNOLOGY HAVE EVOLVED AND MADE THE PERFORMANCE FABRIC STORY STRONGER BECAUSE WE ARE ABLE TO CREATE MORE OPTIONS."**  
— Gloria Tsocos, Outdura



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## Home Hot Spots for Performance Fabrics



### FAMILY AND ENTERTAINMENT AREAS

If you have young children, pets or entertain frequently, your home and lifestyle demand more durable and easily cleanable fabrics.



### DINING AND KITCHEN AREAS

These are the most likely places in the home where spills and splatters can and will happen.



### OUTDOOR

Whether under a covered patio or direct exposure to exterior elements, there are performance fabrics designed to repel water, resist fading and mildew, and deliver better cleanability.



### MUDROOM OR BATHROOM

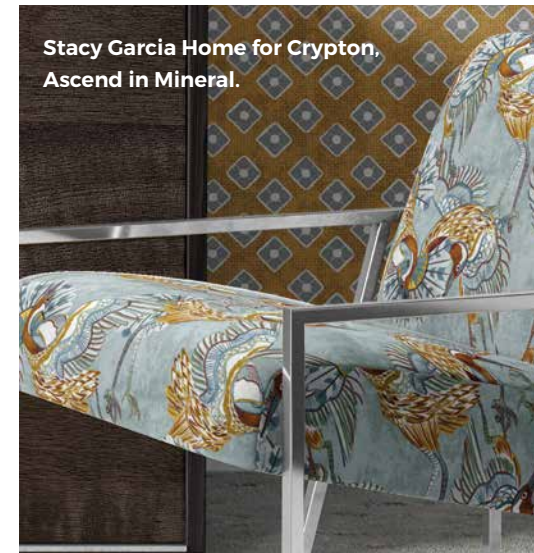
These areas are often overlooked but definitely get heavy use, so it's worth considering a performance fabric for an upholstered mudroom bench or chair at the bathroom vanity.

## BUILD YOUR KNOWLEDGE BASE

### Matching Use and Type

A great starter question when guiding customers to the right performance fabric is: How will the fabric be used — indoor or outdoor, on a sofa in sunny spot in the living room or on dining chairs? The answer will provide a roadmap for which types of performance fabric to consider.

"It's important to understand there are different types of performance fabrics for different uses," says Elise Gabrielson, Marketing Director for Crypton, which launched its residential division about seven years ago after more than 25 years in the hospitality and health care markets. "Education is so important, and we have dedicated outreach directors to help our partners understand the properties of the fabric, what they can expect and how to clean it."



Stacy Garcia Home for Crypton, Ascend in Mineral.



Outdura Arrow outdoor fabric.

### CLEANABILITY

It's important for retailers to manage expectations, advises Christy Almond, Vice President of Product Development and Marketing for North Carolina-based Valdese Weavers, which launched

the InsideOut performance fabric brand in 2017 for indoor and outdoor use. "Not all products are created equal ... and stains are not created equal," she adds.

Different cleaning may be recommended depending on the type of stain or soil, as well as the type of performance fabric. While all performance fabrics market cleanability with simple water and soap solution, only certain brands are bleach cleanable. In terms of stain types, oil-based stains such as those from cooking oils, salad dressing and body lotions may have slightly different cleaning recommendations than ketchup, wine or dirt stains.

### DURABILITY

Defined as the ability to withstand wear and tear, durability is tested and rated for abrasion and pilling. In North America, the Wyzenbeek test method is primarily used, while the Martindale method is considered the international standard.



Revolution outdoor performance fabric from STI.

The Wyzenbeek test abrades the fabric back and forth against another piece of fabric, known as the double-rub test. The standard for residential use is 15,000 double-rubs, and performance fabrics are typically tested to 30,000 double-rubs or higher.

Another aspect of fabric durability is pilling, which occurs when the fibers become loose and ball up from friction. This is typically found with synthetic fibers more than in natural fibers where the release of fibers is in less noticeable "dust" form.

### UV OR FADE RESISTANCE

Whether fully exposed to changing climate conditions as outdoor furniture or indoors in a sunny spot, performance fabrics with UV resistance can prolong the life of the fabric against fading and breakdown. It does not mean that the fabric will never fade or deteriorate, but it will provide some protection from significant fading for the expected lifetime of the furniture.

### PFC- OR FLUORINE-FREE

The emerging concerns with perfluorinated chemicals (PFCs), a group of toxic chemicals that includes PFOA and PFOS both used in water-repellant and stain-resistant products, have prompted changes

in manufacturing of scores of household products. Several leading performance fabric brands say their products are free of PFC or fluorine.



**"THIS SEGMENT OF THE MARKET WILL CONTINUE TO EVOLVE AND GROW AS TECHNOLOGY INCREASES AND THE LINES BETWEEN WHAT CONSUMERS EXPECT FROM PERFORMANCE FABRICS AND WHERE THE MARKET IS TODAY WILL CONTINUE TO BLUR."**  
— Christy Almond, InsideOut by Valdese

**"JUST IN THE LAST TWO YEARS WE HAVE SEEN MANY [COMPANIES] LAUNCHING PERFORMANCE FABRIC LINES ... AND IT IS STILL REALLY EARLY [IN THE CATEGORY] SO WE EXPECT TO SEE CHANGE IN TECHNOLOGIES AND OTHER AREAS."**

— Elise Gabrielson, Crypton Home



**"CLEARER STANDARDS AND DEFINING PERFORMANCE FABRICS [FOR RESIDENTIAL] ARE NEEDED, AND WE BELIEVE THAT IS CHANGE THAT IS COMING."**  
— Ron Swindle, Development Manager, Breathe by Milliken Specialty Interiors



## idea board: performance style

From Sunbrella's Dimension Collection, Resonate is a contemporary, graphic interpretation of the classic Greek key pattern, available in four colorways. The bold linework on fine heathered grounds creates a backlit effect, appearing to ripple with movement. [www.sunbrella.com](http://www.sunbrella.com)



LiveSmart Evolve is made with at least 30% of REPREEVE, a polyester yarn made from recycled post-consumer plastic bottles. The fabrics are durable, resist everyday stains, are easily cleaned and have a water-repellent finish. [www.livesmartbyculp.com](http://www.livesmartbyculp.com)



# PREPARED TO PERFORM

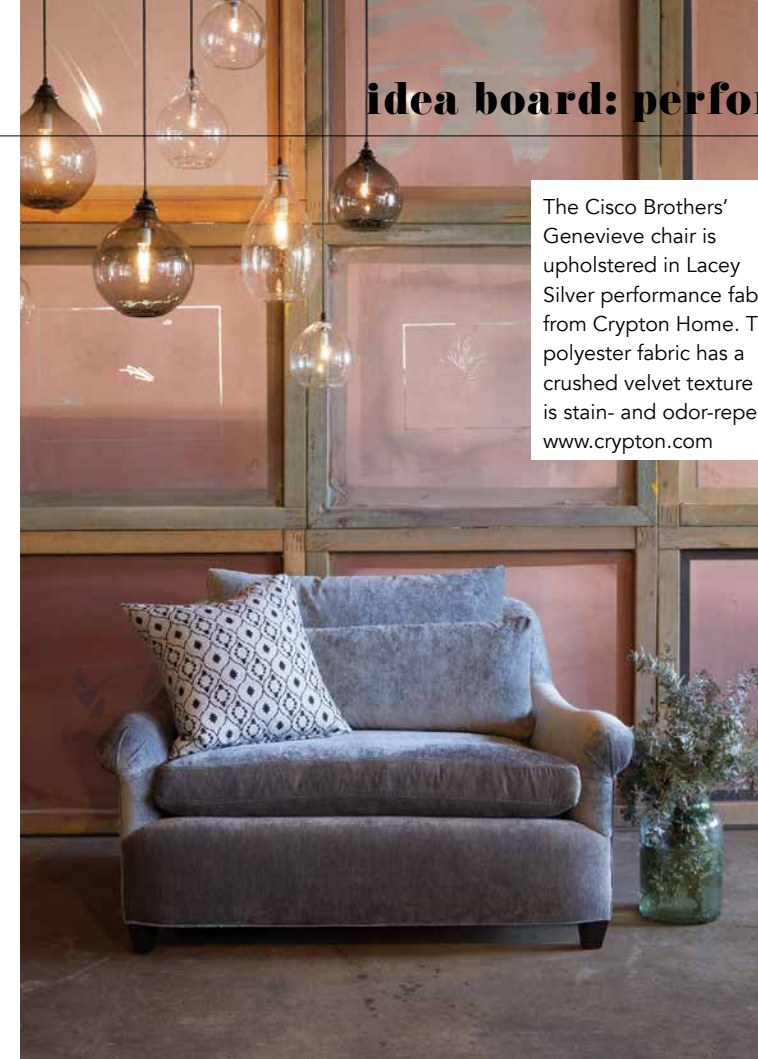
With sustainable materials and colors from nature, these fabrics stand up to the harshest environments.

BY AMY MCINTOSH

Milliken's Breathe upholstery fabrics have a plant-based water repellent that is durable, repels everyday stains and cleans easily without PFCs, fire retardants or other chemicals of concern. They are designed to evoke nature and comfort in a neutral and timeless palette with spa accent tones. [www.breathebymilliken.com](http://www.breathebymilliken.com)

## idea board: performance style

The Cisco Brothers' Genevieve chair is upholstered in Lacey Silver performance fabric from Crypton Home. The polyester fabric has a crushed velvet texture and is stain- and odor-repellent. [www.crypton.com](http://www.crypton.com)



The Duralee Pavilion Inside Out performance fabric collection offers a range of upholstery-weight fabrics constructed with high-UV novelty yarns. Catering to the growing demand for beautiful performance fabrics, this collection offers style sensibility and durability and it is easy to clean. [www.duralee.com](http://www.duralee.com)

The Biophilia 2.0 collection from DesignTex utilizes biophilic design principles to bring a sense of calm, clarity and connectedness to heavily trafficked commercial interiors. It is designed to provide a healthy, beneficial environment by connecting users to the cycles and patterns of nature. [www.designtex.com](http://www.designtex.com)



Valdese Weavers' extensive library of yarns and colors provides InsideOut Performance Fabrics with interesting and dimensional solid textures. From linen looks to menswear-inspired patterns to basket weaves, there is a texture for every style and space, indoors or out. [www.valdeseweavers.com](http://www.valdeseweavers.com)





FROM PLASTIC TO PERFORMANCE

In a recent Green Home Furnishings Study done by the Sustainable Furnishings Council, the vast majority of consumers expressed interest in certification that textiles were safe, high-quality, environmentally friendly and produced in a socially responsible facility. Recyclability — either buying products constructed of recycled materials or knowing their products can be recycled at the end of the life cycle — is an easy measure for many consumers to feel they are doing their part for the environment. “What we humans throw away is the world’s most abundant natural resource now,” says Susan Inglis, the Sustainable Furnishings Council’s Executive Director. Plastic is high on that list, and opportunities to recycle helps the industry as well as the environment. Nearly one million plastic beverage bottles are sold every minute around the world and that number will jump another 20 percent by the year 2021. And, as technology has advanced, textile manufacturers are doing their part to develop more sustainable practices.



“Basically, there is a lot of recycled content you can put in fabric,” says LeAnne Flack, Marketing Manager for Milliken & Co. The company showcased its Breathe brand of performance fabrics at this spring’s ITA Showtime Market, a line of natural-fiber performance textiles, as well as polyester fabrics with a recycled water bottle story. One hundred percent of the fabric is from recycled materials, Flack continues, but the plastic bottle story makes that tangible to the consumer. “Most people know bottles,” she says. “We certify the recycled content with a third party, which guarantees six to 10

recycled bottles per yard of fabric are used. If you need 20 yards of fabric, you’re diverting 200 bottles from the landfill.”

INNOVATING FOR COMFORT

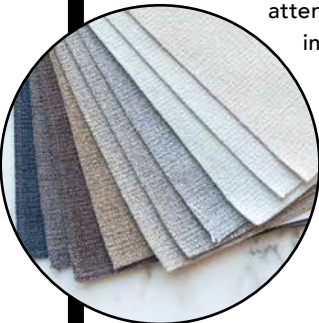
Because plastic water bottles are the base of these materials, it’s important for consumers to understand technology’s role in the texture, allowing for a soft hand, color, textures and even pattern. According to Jessica McClaine, Digital Marketing and Online Sales Coordinator at Culp Inc., the company has partnered with Unifi REPVEVE to develop its new LiveSmart Evolve fabrics, also developed from fiber created with plastic water bottles. Like Milliken’s Breathe polyester, LiveSmart Evolve, which is made with at least 30 percent REPVEVE fiber, converts approximately nine standard-sized plastic water bottles with each linear yard of fabric. Fabric textures in the Evolve line, all polyester, are not hindered by the recycled plastic content. Bottles are cleaned, chopped into flakes, melted into pellets and then extruded into polyester fiber. Once in the fiber stage, it can be dyed and woven into fabric, which for LiveSmart Evolve includes indoor fabrics that mirror linens to velvets.

Milliken’s Flack adds that to be classified as performance fabrics, even these polyester fabrics need surface treatments to repel liquids and stains. “We all have a finish to make the fabrics more repellent,” she says. Milliken has moved to a fluorine-free plant-based coating, however, for all of its Breathe performance fabrics. Some fluorine coatings, PFAS or PFCs (see sidebar), have been under scrutiny and are not recyclable.

Breathe fabrics are Green Guard Gold certified, which indicates rigorous chemical emissions standards are met, and can actually improve indoor air quality, adds Nancye Edwards, Project Lead at Bright + Co. Marketing, which works with Milliken.

These initiatives are providing a message that resonates with the consumer. “In the home, consumers not only want maintainable fabrics, but also fabrics that are environmentally conscious,” says Culp’s McClaine. Nothing says recyclable quite like a story that diverts plastic bottles. \*

By Diane Falvey



Chemical Reaction

What factors can impact performance textiles’ sustainability story?

As more attention is focused on the environment, consumers are paying attention to the environmental impact of the products they buy. “More and more consumers appreciate transparency, especially for significant purchases. They look for companies who are doing the right thing,” says Susan Inglis, Executive Director of the Sustainable Furnishings Council (SFC). “Companies do well when they tell their sustainability story, exactly how and why this fabric performs and how they’ve come to their production decisions.”

Sustainability Metrics

Raw Materials, Processing and End of Life for textiles are three areas the SFC reviews to determine a fabric’s impact on the environment. Within these are key components that are addressed, such as renewability, energy use and waste generation for raw materials; post-fiber treatments, energy use and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions during production; and recyclability and disposal once a product is no longer in use.

As fabric production moves toward accountability within these segments, says Inglis, post fiber treatment demands attention. Historically, companies have used highly fluorinated chemicals known as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) to repel water and oils. Chemicals in this class include PFOA, PFOS and more than 3,000 other related compounds, according to sixclasses.org. These substances can deliver a double whammy to a fabric’s sustainability story. There have been toxicity concerns with these chemicals, and fabrics treated with certain PFAS cannot be recycled.

As with other chemical classes, not all PFAS are created equal, and many companies are moving toward coatings with less impact on the environment. C8 chemistry is now regulated in some places and has been abandoned by responsible companies voluntarily, says Inglis, replaced with C6, C4 or nano-technologies.



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